

Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project

Wetlands Managers Group Report

November 29, 2001

Regional Strategy

Summary of Recommended Actions

- Reaffirm appropriate role of water quality objectives: The WRP's primary objective is improving habitat quality and quantity. Water quality benefits that result from WRP Projects will be of great value, but will not necessarily determine project selection or design.
- Adopt the *WRP Regional Strategy* and *Five Year Implementation Plan*

Introduction

The Wetlands Recovery Project Working Agreement calls for the development of a regional strategy for wetlands restoration and a rolling five-year implementation plan. Over the past year, the Wetlands Managers Group has worked with the County Task Forces and Science Advisory Panel to draft the *WRP Regional Strategy* and *Five Year Implementation Plan*. The long-term vision of the WRP is to reestablish a mosaic of functioning wetland and riparian systems that supports a diversity of fish and wildlife species. The purpose of the Regional Strategy is to define a set of overarching goals to guide the efforts of the Wetlands Recovery Project and its partner organizations towards achieving this vision. The regional goals will provide a framework for setting policies and priorities for acquisition and restoration projects. This framework can be used by all of the partners of the WRP – at the federal, state, and local level – to ensure that individual wetlands projects are part of a comprehensive and coordinated recovery effort.

At the May 18, 2001 Governing Board meeting, the WMG presented the six draft Regional Goals for discussion. Following that meeting, a draft of the entire Regional Strategy was posted to the WRP website for review and comment. In addition, members of the Regional Strategy subcommittee met with each of the County Task Forces to discuss key issues and concerns in each of the counties. The Regional Strategy has been revised to incorporate the comments received. A copy of the Regional Strategy is included in the Governing Board meeting packet. In addition, some summary information from the Strategy is attached to this memo.

The WMG presentation at the November 29, 2001 Governing Board meeting will focus on the *Five Year Implementation Plan*, which is Chapter 5 of the Regional Strategy. This chapter has been flagged in the enclosed copy of the Regional Strategy.

WRP's Role Regarding Water Quality

During review of the Regional Strategy, the Science Advisory Panel requested that the Governing Board clarify the WRP's objectives in regards to water quality and determine whether these objectives are adequately reflected in the Strategy. The WMG's understanding has been that the WRP's role in improving water quality is primarily related to improving fish and wildlife habitat. Water quality improvements related to human use that are achieved through increased water polishing capabilities of restored wetlands are a supplementary benefit of the WRP's efforts to restore and enhance wetlands, but not a primary objective. The Regional Strategy is currently written based on this understanding. Therefore, improving water quality is discussed as a strategy for restoring coastal wetlands and coastal watersheds. However, improving water quality is not elevated to the level of a Regional Goal in the same way that recovering habitat diversity is.

An alternative approach would be to define improving water quality as a primary objective of the WRP for reasons above and beyond improving habitat (e.g., improving beneficial uses for humans). In this case, the goal of improving water quality would be on par with the goal of improving habitat and would be reflected as such in the Regional Strategy.

The WRP's specific role in regards to water quality has significant implications for setting regional goals and identifying priority projects. The WMG discussed this issue and agreed that increasing the WRP's focus on water quality concerns would divert staff and funding resources from the primary objective of increasing the quantity and quality of wetlands habitat in Southern California. In addition, it would be duplicative of work being done by local government, the State and Regional Water Boards, as well as the Environmental Protection Agency. Finally, increasing the WRP's water quality focus would require substantial changes in our structure, program, and support network.

Based on these discussions, the Managers Group recommends that the WRP continue to focus on water quality improvements as an aspect of habitat quality because this approach is most consistent with the WRP's long-term vision (i.e., to reestablish a mosaic of fully functioning wetlands systems with a diversity of habitat types and connections to upland communities that preserves and recovers self-sustaining populations of species). If the Governing Board does not adopt this recommendation, then the WMG recommends that the Board adopt a clear policy on the WRP's objective regarding water quality and provide guidance on how this policy should be reflected in the regional strategy.

Finalizing the Regional Strategy

Following resolution of the water quality issue, the WMG recommends that the Governing Board adopt the Regional Strategy. Once approved, the Strategy will be published for distribution. The final document will include maps, photos, and sidebar discussions. Due to the length of the document, an Executive Summary version will be prepared for wider distribution. Full versions of the document will be distributed to all of the state and federal partners and posted to the WRP

website. Limited copies of the full document will also be available to the public in hard copy, possibly for a fee.

Outline of the Regional Strategy:

Chapter 1: Introduction

- Coastal Southern California and its Wetlands
- The Wetlands Recovery Project
- Regional Recovery Strategy

Chapter II: Southern California Wetlands

- Regional Setting
- Decline of Southern California Wetlands

Chapter III: WRP Regional Goals

For each goal:

- Statement of Need
- Key Strategies

Chapter IV: County Objectives

For each county:

- Summary of Existing Conditions
- Objectives

Chapter V: 5-Year Implementation Strategy, *bound separately and updated as needed*.
This chapter will be drafted after completion of main document.

Appendix A: Related Regional Planning Efforts

Appendix B: Summary of existing conditions by watershed.

Table 3.1 Regional Goals and Key Strategies

REGIONAL GOAL	KEY STRATEGIES
Goal 1: Preserve and restore coastal wetland ecosystems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Acquire coastal wetlands. B. Acquire contiguous wetland and upland areas at sites that are already primarily in public (or conservation) ownership. C. Restore diversity and quality of wetland habitat types. D. Restore ecosystem functions. E. Address watershed impacts.
Goal 2: Preserve and restore stream corridors and wetland ecosystems in coastal watersheds.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Preserve riparian and aquatic habitat along stream corridors. B. Restore riparian and aquatic habitat along stream corridors. C. Reconnect creek and river corridors to their floodplains. D. Restore sediment transport functions and characteristic patterns. E. Reduce erosion, both along stream channels and from upland areas. F. Improve water quality. G. Preserve and restore wetlands, particularly vernal pools, in coastal watersheds.
Goal 3: Recover native habitat and species diversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Restore a diversity of habitat types. B. Employ a multi-species approach to wetlands recovery. C. Preserve and restore habitat linkages and fish and wildlife corridors. D. Preserve and restore rare wetlands, including vernal pools. E. Preserve and restore surrounding upland and dune habitat. F. Remove exotic species and re-establish native species. G. Recover native, extirpated species.
Goal 4: Integrate wetlands recovery with other public objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Promote integration of wetlands conservation planning and priorities into related public policies and projects. B. Promote wetlands projects with multiple objectives.
Goal 5: Promote education and compatible access related to coastal wetlands and watersheds.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Develop compatible public access opportunities. B. Integrate interpretive programs into wetlands and watershed projects. C. Promote opportunities for experiential learning. D. Promote development and dissemination of educational materials and activities related to coastal wetlands and coastal watersheds. E. Research and disseminate information about the economic value of wetlands. F. Promote practices to reduce urban impacts on wetlands and watersheds.
Goal 6: Advance the science of wetlands restoration in Southern California.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Promote research on wetland ecology and restoration science, as well as on issues affecting the success and long-term sustainability of wetland restorations in Southern California. B. Promote development of more effective monitoring programs for both regional and project-specific assessments. C. Disseminate Information.

Table 5.1 Summary of Implementation Actions

Implementation	Action	WRP Lead
1. Develop and implement preservation, restoration, and enhancement projects. (Regional Goals 1-3)	1.1 Develop a decision support tool to help assess both preservation and restoration potential based on ecological objectives.	SAP
	1.2 Identify needs for each watershed in the region.	CTF
	1.3 Identify restoration priorities for steelhead trout.	SCC
	1.4 Identify preservation and restoration priorities for the Santa Monica Mountains and south Santa Barbara coastal watersheds.	SCC
	1.5 Coordinate with regional agencies on mutual priorities.	WMG, SCC
	1.6 Continue project evaluation and selection process for annual Work Plan.	WMG
	1.7 Target project development efforts to priority area.	SCC, CTF
	1.8 Develop projects with multiple benefits.	SCC, CTF
	1.9 Build capacity and expertise of local agencies and organizations.	SCC, CTF, WMG
	1.10 Create a regional watershed network.	CTF
	1.11 Continue to implement projects.	SCC
	1.12 Secure project funding from state, federal, local, and private sources.	BOG, PAC
	1.13 Facilitate regulatory coordination for WRP projects.	WMG, BOG
2. Integrate wetlands recovery with other public objectives. (Regional Goal 4)	2.1 Coordinate with agencies working on related efforts to ensure wetlands objectives are considered.	WMG, SCC, CTF
3. Promote education and compatible access related to coastal wetlands and watersheds. (Regional Goal 5)	3.1 Develop guidelines for compatible access.	WMG, CTF
	3.2 Perform needs assessment regarding regional availability of accessible wetland areas and interpretive centers.	WMG, CTF
	3.3 Create a regional wetlands and watersheds calendar.	CTF
	3.4 Create a web-based guide describing the location, accessibility, sights, and activities at wetlands and watersheds throughout the region.	PAC, CTF
	3.5 Establish a means to track or estimate visitors to the region's wetlands and riparian areas.	PAC, CTF
	3.6 Continue to educate federal, state, and local decision-makers.	PAC
	3.7 Identify key educational themes for region's wetlands.	PAC
	3.8 Inventory wetlands materials in the five counties.	PAC
	3.9 Develop web site for sharing and disseminating education resources.	PAC, SCC
	3.10 Continue to develop needed outreach materials and activities.	PAC

Implementation	Action	WRP Lead
	3.11 Ensure that the WRP addresses the needs of the region's ethnically diverse population.	PAC
	3.12 Establish means for private sector to play more active role in the WRP.	PAC
4. Advance the science of wetlands restoration and management in Southern California. (Regional Goal 6)	4.1 Develop regional habitat objectives for the WRP.	SAP
	4.2 Develop regional monitoring program based on regional habitat objectives.	SAP
	4.3 Develop monitoring guidelines for WRP projects.	SAP
	4.4 Develop an extramurally-funded research program.	SAP
5. Promote information exchange and dissemination. (All Regional Goals)	5.1 Expand the WRP Information Station.	SCC, WMG, CTF
	5.2 Establish Watershed Contact Network.	SCF
	5.3 Expand WRP web site.	SCC
	5.4 Continue to hold WRP Symposium every one or two years.	WMG
	5.5 Coordinate with related efforts to disseminate information.	WMG, CTF
6. Partner Agencies (All Regional Goals)	6.1 Identify specific roles or actions for each of the 17 state and federal partner agencies to further the WRP's regional goals.	All agencies
7. Funding Objectives (All Regional Goals)	7.1 Secure project funding from the state each fiscal year.	BOG, PAC
	7.2 Increase proportion of federal, local, and private funding.	BOG, PAC
	7.3 Pursue long-term project funding.	BOG, WMG
	7.4 Pursue long-term funding for the County Task Forces.	PAC, CTF
	7.5 Secure funding for the Science Advisory Panel and SAP Research Program.	BOG, PAC, SAP

Key to WRP Lead:

- SCC – State Coastal Conservancy
- BOG – Board of Governors
- WMG – Wetlands Managers Group
- PAC – Public Advisory Committee
- SAP – Science Advisory Panel
- CTF – County Task Forces